

# Jonathan Lethem

I tweaked my nipples to try and bring the pleasure back, but it was no go. "Shit." Why weren't we on ship? Where were we? "Something to drink," I croaked.

"Explain," I said. "But make me come again, too."

Remember about the Godballs? he wanted to know. "Yeah," I said. "Those lumps of flesh – they dream things, right? And they're endangered, there's only a few left."

"Oh yeah," I said, and then Suit did something that made me add: "Mmmm."

"I guess I cut that class," I said sarcastically. I hate it when Suit gets patronizing.

"Has an Assassin ever been stopped?"

Never.

I tried to fake a yawn, but then Suit made me come.

There were three men inside, according to Suit, and

Trouble started the moment we touched down. When the airlock sealed above us the lights in the port went out. Suit kept me sealed up, not trusting the air, and threw out a single beam from my forehead, like a miner's helmet. I located the station entrance and took a few steps towards it before a laser beam hissed out a foot ahead of me, about chest-high. Suit threw me to the ground and grew turrets, and his light went strobe. He would time his movements to coincide perfectly with the blackouts, and the enemy, whoever that was, would perceive me as a teleporting armoured tank.

Suit dropped a mike over my mouth and I said: "Shoot again and you die." Suit boomed it out in a voice that must have rattled their eyeballs.

One of them yelled: "Tell us who you are."

“Clothes,” I whispered to Suit. He shut off the light and shrank away the body armour, leaving me in a tight-fitting bodysuit with a weapons belt on my hip. The extra material became a luggage trunk on wheels at my side.

"I – we thought you were the Assassin," said the first one, the one who'd yelled. There was a dark patch of sweat under both arms of his jumpsuit. "We thought the message was a trick."

“Nope,” I said. “You’re luckier than that.” I picked up the rest of Suit and nodded at the door, and the men stumbled after me wordlessly, fumbling at the locks on their weapons. I could see a panicky glaze of adrenalin in their eyes; these weren’t ordinarily men of action.

mystery, but not being part of it. That was it. I wouldn't die in the fire of unknowing, but I would always know of the mystery behind all things.

I pulled out my pocket knife and recut the spring's true name in the sign. I threw three handfuls of earth over the body of the fallen dancer. Let the natural order reclaim what belongs to it – just as the unnatural fire which sets artists apart had reclaimed its share. I drove my white Chevy pickup back to town. There was nothing to connect me with the ranger's death. I thought about the ecstasy in the faces of the dancers. I hadn't drunk from Castalia. Silander was right. The Nine are neither friends nor enemies of mankind. But in my mind how the spring glistens.



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